

# THE TRI-WEEKLY COMMONWEALTH.

VOL. 9.

FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY, MARCH 14, 1860.

NO. 140.

THE TRI-WEEKLY COMMONWEALTH  
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## THE COMMONWEALTH.

From the Cincinnati Gazette.

**Speech of the Hon. Wm. H. Wadsworth, of Maysville, before the Opposition State Convention, at Frankfort, Ky., February 22, 1860.**

Gentlemen of the Convention—I feel wholly unable to express the thanks that are due from me, for the honor you have conferred upon me to day. I don't know why you did it. A stranger to the most of you—all unknown to fame, at least with other reputation than that of "a plain, blunt man," whose whole soul was in that system of Kentucky policy which has been condemned, illustrated and adorned by your dead, as well as your living, great and statesmen, Kentucky Whigerry and Kentucky Conservation. I don't know unless it be on these grounds, why you have elected me to carry your flag in the contest that is to come of this Summer.

Be the reason what it may, I am induced to hope and believe, that so far at least as the selection of myself is concerned, I may sugar favorably for the cause of the people. I conclude the Opposition of Kentucky have resolved to take the work into their own hands, and that they, with uncommon ardor, and unusual zeal in tend to support the humble standard bearer whom they have elected to do battle for the principles upon which they have this day planted themselves.

I am the more reconciled to this appointment, and am the more deeply grateful for and flattered by it, when I recollect the men from whom it has come. When I consider that you are a beaten party—that even in the days of your glory, when your great statesmen went down, time and again, before the cohorts of Democracy, and that before and since his death, Seward, was and ever has been unable to decrease the fervor of your patriotism or damp the ardor of your courage, I am the prouder to have received such an honor at your hands. (Loud applause.) When I recollect that no glittering office invites you to Frankfort; that you have no convenient Executive, holding the patronage of an hundred millions a year, and a hundred thousand offices to parcel out amongst his pretorian followers, that there are none of these incentives to invite you from your distant homes, to assemble here in such numbers to consult for the public weal, I am the prouder to be your standard bearer. I know that nothing but your devotion to the Constitution and your love of the Union could have brought you here, since those great incentives to a political contest are wanting.

You have done a good work to day, my countrymen, in the stand you have taken, and in the principles you have promulgated—a work that I trust, will bear rich fruits—a work of peace, of love, of patriotism—a work that may be instrumental, at least, in reconciling the people of our common country once more—a work worthy of the past fame of Kentucky as the home of conservatism, and as the most deeply devoted of all the sisterhood of States to this Union. I can stand upon that platform. I can give it my most hearty concurrence; it is a platform so just; so in accordance with the constitution and the laws; so necessary in view of past and transpiring events, that I know not how any party in all the land can refuse its support.

Permit me briefly to run over the subject. The conflict began with the formation of the government.

Why, it is laid down in the Constitution that the slave trade, which was once a common avocation, should no longer be prosecuted after twenty years, or rather, that your Congress might prohibit it after twenty years. A conflict began there. All the States were then slaveholding States. In 1787 the ordinance was passed that dedicated the N. W. Territory to free labor. The conflict was then in progress.

In 1820 upon the application of Missouri for admission into the Union, the conflict assumed a definite form and shape and shook the foundations of this Union. It was settled by a compromise; but in 1833—4, the people of the Northern States sympathizing with those movements set foot in Europe founded in a hatred of the institution, or in the belief that it was a moral, social and political evil, began anew the conflict by sending petitions to Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and in the forts and arsenals of the United States. When peace was about to be declared with Mexico, it was evident that territory was to be acquired as "indemnity for the past and security for the future," the Wilmot proviso was introduced into Congress to dedicate all that country to freedom. That contention lasted until 1830, when the debate on the compromise measures will show you if these were permanent or temporary causes. We thought that controversy was settled by the adoption of the compromise measures; but in 1853—4 this conflict between slavery and the opponents of slavery broke out again upon the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. A party was at once organized upon the sole idea of opposition to slavery. That party speedily ran over the Northern States, and it holds, this day, nearly all those States in its power.

What, then, is the cause? It is the belief on the part of the Northern people, shared in by most of the civilized States of Europe, that slavery is an evil, socially, morally and politically. How are you to eradicate such an opinion as that? We are told by Mr. Memminger, of South Carolina, that secession is the remedy. It is in vain to point him and his followers to the fact that the North is filled with thousands of conservative men—that there are Everett and Winthrop to show devotion to the rights of the South. They tell us these men say it is an evil, and as long as they refuse to defend it upon the ground that it is a social, moral and good, they have given up the defense of slavery, and we cannot expect safety from them. They tell you the dread alternative is offered us of going out of the Union. In his application to the State of Virginia on behalf of South Carolina, to appoint delegates to a conference of the Southern States, Mr. Memminger takes at distinct ground, and with a power of elaboration which I much envy him, he proceeds to show that it is utterly impossible, in this Union, to expect any safety for slavery, or any equality of rights for the South, as long as the civilized world of the North and of Europe entertains the opinion that it is an evil. He, therefore, recommended that Virginia should concur in the Southern Convention, to conclude on the best mode of protecting the South in the Union, or to expedite the manner of going out of it.

That question, then, is a living question, and is before you to day. If you are willing to go out of the Union on that ground, you must go out, for I tell you that the Northern people never will come to the opinion that slavery is a blessing either to the North or the South. The anti-slavery opinion of the North is wound round the hearts of Northern people; they learned it at the mother's knee; it was taught them in the school house; it is preached from the pulpit; it is a part of their every impulse, of their intellectual, social and religious belief that slavery is an evil. You must expect, therefore, as long as you associate with your brethren of the North, that your associations will be with men who entertain that opinion. If you cannot associate with such, you must prepare to see this Union broken in pieces. You must dissolve the Union, or like men resolve firmly that no mere opinion of your countrymen hostile to slavery shall drive you from it. (Immense applause.)

You declare that the institution of slavery in States where it exists must not be molested; that you will defend it by all the sanctions of law, of morals and of physical force. I do not understand that any party except the very extremists of the Abolitionists avow an intent to touch it in such States. I understand all the Republicans, those who follow Seward, and those who follow Corwin—to say that they do not seek to interfere with it in the States.

Again, you declare the fugitive slave law must be enforced. I understand the Republicans, many of them, are willing to enforce it; I understand Abraham Lincoln to have declared during his contest with Douglas, that if he were elected a Senator of the U. S. he would feel bound by his oath of office to maintain the fugitive slave law; and that even if there were none in existence it would be his bounden duty to give us such a law to return our fugitive, else he would be a perfused man. I understand Corwin and others to have said the same, because they find it in the Constitution that fugitives shall be returned. (Loud applause.)

You have again declared that you adhere to the principles settled in the compromise measures of 1850; that you do not believe the inhabitants of a territory have an inherent right of self-government derived from Almighty God, or from any other less sacred source; that you believe they have no right of government except such as is conferred upon them by the representatives of the people of these States to whom the territory belongs, and in whom its sovereignty exists. You recognize, however, the right of the people of a territory, when they come to form a State Constitution, to settle their domestic institutions, of whatever character, for themselves. The African Slave trade, has, in fact, been re-opened; cargoes of Africans, freshly imported, have been landed upon our shores, and the men who have been guilty of the act once declared a piracy, have gone "unwhipped of justice." Large numbers have recently sanctioned this violation of an express act of Congress, and strangely enough, those very men who say all the world is in the enforcement of the laws and the observance of the Constitution, have themselves set up a great and damning example of defiance to law.

This traffic is not only sustained by exceptional advocates, but the most distinguished statesmen of the South in the Democratic party, have lent the sanction of their approval; and I understand that a man of genius, a man who once sat at the feet of Henry Clay; a man upon whom we built bright hopes for his country's good; even

Stephens, of Georgia has lent himself to the iniquitous scheme. It is, therefore, no idle declamation that comes from the people of Kentucky. The times demand it.

There, then, are the points of difference that are to keep the people of the South and the people of the North from once more, in the spirit of concord and brotherly love attending to their own neglected affairs and taking in charge this great experiment of self-government that they may in the fashion of the olden time elect Presidents, organize Cabinets and fill all the great offices from amongst the honest, the competent and the patriotic.

What remains? Why our Northern brethren contend that if we should acquire territory here after, or if there be any territory now to be organized, they have the right, and it will be their policy, to apply to those Territories the Missouri restriction or the Wilmot proviso. They claim they have the right to restrict slavery in the Territories, to dedicate all future States to free labor. Well, if that is a living issue, let us examine it. What territory now can be the subject of the power? Kansas is ready to be admitted in the Union; it may be the pleasure of Congress to admit Kansas this winter; I know not whether they will enforce the provisions of the English bill, but it is evident to every man of the least observation, that Kansas must inevitably come into the Union in a short space of time with a free State constitution. All the other Territories of the country are organized. Under the happy act of 1850, New Mexico and Utah have been organized. Oregon has become a State, and the provisions of the Wilmot Proviso apply to Washington Territory. To what Territory can this principle be applied? I know of none. Perhaps if it be the destiny of this country to pursue a career of conquest; if it be that this great Anglo-Saxon people are to travel all over the Continent of America, this principle may be of great significance; but I ask you if it is of such importance as to justify us in going on in a course of conduct in the present, which will lead to the separation of the States?

I know that I can advance nothing which is new to the gentlemen who hear me; I know that I speak to many men who could teach me, and that before and since his death, Seward, was and ever has been unable to decrease the fervor of your patriotism or damp the ardor of your courage, I am the prouder to have received such an honor at your hands. (Loud applause.) When I recollect that no glittering office invites you to Frankfort; that you have no convenient Executive, holding the patronage of an hundred millions a year, and a hundred thousand offices to parcel out amongst his pretorian followers, that there are none of these incentives to invite you from your distant homes, to assemble here in such numbers to consult for the public weal, I am the prouder to be your standard bearer. I know that nothing but your devotion to the Constitution and your love of the Union could have brought you here, since those great incentives to a political contest are wanting.

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What, then, is the cause? It is the belief on the part of the Northern people, shared in by most of the civilized States of Europe, that slavery is an evil, socially, morally and politically. How are you to eradicate such an opinion as that? We are told by Mr. Memminger, of South Carolina, that secession is the remedy. It is in vain to point him and his followers to the fact that the North is filled with thousands of conservative men—that there are Everett and Winthrop to show devotion to the rights of the South. They tell us these men say it is an evil, and as long as they refuse to defend it upon the ground that it is a social, moral and good, they have given up the defense of slavery, and we cannot expect safety from them. They tell you the dread alternative is offered us of going out of the Union. In his application to the State of Virginia on behalf of South Carolina, to appoint delegates to a conference of the Southern States, Mr. Memminger takes at distinct ground, and with a power of elaboration which I much envy him, he proceeds to show that it is utterly impossible, in this Union, to expect any safety for slavery, or any equality of rights for the South, as long as the civilized world of the North and of Europe entertains the opinion that it is an evil. He, therefore, recommended that Virginia should concur in the Southern Convention, to conclude on the best mode of protecting the South in the Union, or to expedite the manner of going out of it.

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You declare that the institution of slavery in States where it exists must not be molested; that you will defend it by all the sanctions of law, of morals and of physical force. I do not understand that any party except the very extremists of the Abolitionists avow an intent to touch it in such States. I understand all the Republicans, those who follow Seward, and those who follow Corwin—to say that they do not seek to interfere with it in the States.

Again, you declare the fugitive slave law must be enforced. I understand the Republicans, many of them, are willing to enforce it; I understand Abraham Lincoln to have declared during his contest with Douglas, that if he were elected a Senator of the U. S. he would feel bound by his oath of office to maintain the fugitive slave law; and that even if there were none in existence it would be his bounden duty to give us such a law to return our fugitive, else he would be a perfused man. I understand Corwin and others to have said the same, because they find it in the Constitution that fugitives shall be returned. (Loud applause.)

You have again declared that you adhere to the principles settled in the compromise measures of 1850; that you do not believe the inhabitants of a territory have an inherent right of self-government derived from Almighty God, or from any other less sacred source; that you believe they have no right of government except such as is conferred upon them by the representatives of the people of these States to whom the territory belongs, and in whom its sovereignty exists. You recognize, however, the right of the people of a territory, when they come to form a State Constitution, to settle their domestic institutions, of whatever character, for themselves. The African Slave trade, has, in fact, been re-opened; cargoes of Africans, freshly imported, have been landed upon our shores, and the men who have been guilty of the act once declared a piracy, have gone "unwhipped of justice." Large numbers have recently sanctioned this violation of an express act of Congress, and strangely enough, those very men who say all the world is in the enforcement of the laws and the observance of the Constitution, have themselves set up a great and damning example of defiance to law.

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"Come home again.  
And we shall shock them!"

But this difference of opinion touching the nature and character of slavery and its necessary outgrowth must part us. They tell us so. It has come to that. Mr. Memminger and his class of politicians in the South teach an "irrepressible conflict" as much as Mr. Seward and his associates; and as far as the two opinions which I have noticed are concerned, there is a conflict which is irrepressible.

I do not, however, regard the two systems of labor as antagonistic. There are many people of the North, and many in Europe, whose support is guaranteed by slave labor. The exports of the South are two hundred millions of dollars, and three or four millions of the inhabitants of the North and many more of Europe are maintained by it. The shipping of the North is maintained in great part by the products of the South. A large portion of the Northern people would starve at once if they struck out slave labor. What would become of English civilization without cotton, or of European civilization without the products of slave labor? I do not believe that they themselves would be in favor of striking out slave labor. I do not believe it is possible to strike it out of existence—at least I cannot conceive that it is possible within the range of centuries.

So far from there being a conflict between the labor of the North and South, there is a wide diversity that makes each system a support to the other.

As to the nature and character of slavery that ever has been, even will be, conflicting opinion.

Suppose we listen to the counsel of South Carolina—that State which has been gangrened with hate ever since the time of the tariff act; the State that has stood out like a dark storm hanging over the Union since 1828; a State always angry with her sisters; suppose we listen to her counsel and go out of the Union, will that have any effect to soften the asperities of a civilized world or to change its opinions with regard to the nature and character of the institution of slavery?

What man in the North will change his opinion? Would not this conflict still rage?

Would not Abolition societies exist, and would Abolition journals still preach their accursed doctrines?

Would not the Pope of Rome still write encyclical letters against it?

Would not every man in America that now raises his voice against Slavery still cry aloud in denunciation? Yes! All this would continue, and its force, and perhaps its effect, would be increased.

Again, what blessings shall come from this dissipation? Mr. Memminger tells us that it will be forever impossible for the Southern States to extend slavery inside of the Union; that we cannot hope to extend the institution of slavery. What prospect of extending would there be if we dissolve the Union? Would not the principle of the new allies, the election of Fremont, be a dissolution of the Union?

They are immediately promoted—high and lucrative office is bestowed upon them; charmed with the profitable employment of saving their country in the Democratic party, they swallow down their life-long political convictions, become the most zealous advocates and defenders of their new party, and the most bitter and unrelenting persecutors of the old.

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